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ABSTRACT

Humor in literature and children's responses to humor deserve serious study. Humor in literature may focus on a character's method for coping with a disturbing situation, problems (such as riddles) that engender sudden insights when things fall into place, or ludicrous characters. Incongruity and surprise also play an important part in humor and occur in many children's books. The tragi-comic development in children's literature may be traced back to oral folk literature; and children's books around the world provide examples of character humor, incongruity between reality and fantasy, ridiculous or slapstick situations, and word play. Psychologists have studied children's response to humor from a Piagetian standpoint, the relationship of comprehension and moral development to children's humor responses, and maturational differences in response. Other relevant research has included studies of the relationship of intelligence to children's humor choices, the types of humor children prefer, and children's reactions to various kinds of humor stimuli. Teachers can carry out their own action research to find out what children laugh at. (The paper lists 51 books and articles, including humorous children's books and relevant research reports.) (GW)

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# A Look at Humor in Literature and Children's Responses to Humor

Session: Comedy and Tragedy: Universal Themes in Children's Literature

Humor in literature, as in life, is derived from the universal problems of the human condition. An Italian is faced with many of the same tragi-comic situations as a Japanese, a Russian, a German, or a British citizen. It seems likely, therefore, that some literary humor may reflect a specific culture but much of it will be found, in similar forms, from country to country throughout the world. That is true to a large extent because much of humor rests on the ever-present human struggle to maintain hope in the midst of life's crises, small and large.

Humor is one way of dealing with the confrontations we would most like to avoid: poverty, low social status, loss of a treasured friend or possession, inability to attain a sought-after goal, an unhappy family situation from which there seems no escape, a life filled with one potential crisis after another, as children often perceive their school days, and so on. Folk literature from virtually every culture

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contains some or all of these themes and they appear in contemporary literature for children, as well.

When escape from a threatening situation appears as a theme in literature, it may be developed either as tragedy or as comedy. That point deserves some elaboration. Any person, when faced with a potentially threatening situation -- loss of face, failure, or some other difficulty, may choose whether to deal with it in a tragic or a comic manner. If we choose the tragic mode, we view the situation in the worst possible light, imagining it as injurious, an affront against us or against society. On the other hand, we may choose to handle the situation with a comic twist -- throwing the personal problem into relief against the tapestry of society so that it becomes just one small fleck in the spectrum of troubles human beings encounter. Viewed in that way, it seems suddenly so small and insignificant as to be ridiculous or so ordinary that we wonder how we could have thought it unique. To a large extent, it is the ability to view a situation as part of a timeless and wide ranging scene -- a universal condition -- that leads to the comic interpretation. It is not that we do not want to change the situation or that we will not try to change it. The comic interpretation simply says that we intend to make the best of it for the time, using laughter as a resource. And so it is that many similarities exist in themes of comic and tragic stories.

A person's response to a problem can determine whether it is viewed as tragic or comic. Response is the key word. The point at which a reader enters into a piece of humorous literature and reacts to the humor is especially important here because the reader's response is influenced by previous experiences, by personality, perhaps even by

a mood of the moment. Response is also influenced by aspects of the literary work. In an attempt to look more closely at the interaction that takes place between a child and a humorous story, this paper will take into account theoretical discussions of humor, specific examples of humor in children's books from a variety of countries, and information from pertinent research.

Theories of Humor

What are some of the qualities of life which, portrayed in literature, provoke laughter? There are universal situations, even concerns and fears, which may strike a chord of laughter when they are restructured in the form of jokes, cartoons, or funny stories. Theorists and empirical researchers have been interested in the effect of such humorous material on those who hear or read it. As an example, consider this cartoon: It shows an owl on a tree branch talking to a companion owl. The second owl, with a startled expression, listens to the first owl say: "They're never getting me out in a pea-green boat with any pussy - cat." (36) Most people can visualize a situation that would be as personally disagreeable as the pea-green boat plus cat was to that owl. We can laugh because the threat is not immediate; and, by laughing at our fears, we lessen them somewhat. In this manner, laughter helps to remove the threat of a disturbing situation. In fact, Max Eastman suggested that laughter may be an instinct we have for making the best of a bad thing. It is truly a useful trait.

People almost universally find satisfaction and pleasure in solving a tricky problem. A theory of humor known as the configurational theory explains some of our laughter as enjoyment of the sudden insight that

comes when things fall into place. The "aha!" of Gestalt psychology helps to explain the laughter that often comes in response to riddles and other play on words. This riddle from The Monster Riddle Book is an example of the need for understanding relationships as a prelude to laughter: "What does the werewolf eat for a snack?" (ladyfingers). (40) A word puzzle from a Russian book of riddles, Hedgehog Gloves, makes similar demands on the reader: "Who is she? What do you think? -- A little minx dressed up in .....(mink)." (44)

A third focus of humor has to do with laughter at characters. It concerns the laughter that comes from a "sudden glory" at discovering that we are better or smarter than others. Theorists disagree as to the intent of this kind of humor. Thomas Hobbes thought of it as the laughter of bitterness but Eastman considered the element of surprise at least as important as the egoism that is implied. Whatever the source of the humor, it is likely that it is related to a genuine fear that we are not as bright or as good as we ought to be.

Character humor is often directed toward a comic character who is so stupid or absent-minded as to be ludicrous. Take this example from "The Mixed-up Feet and the Silly Bridegroom" in Zlateh the Goat. (45) The foolish bridegroom loses one after another of the engagement gifts given him by his prospective father-in-law and bride. He loses them because he is too foolish to think sensibly. He puts a penknife under the hay in his wagon and, of course, it is lost. When he is told that the penknife should have gone into his pocket, he promises to remember what to do the next time that he receives a gift. Unfortunately, the next gift is a jar of chicken fat which he puts into his pocket. And so the story goes, as he places a coin in the hay and loses it, puts some eggs into his purse and breaks them, puts a duck into a basket

and covers it with a rag so that it smothers, and puts a goldfish into a cage with some corn to eat, giving each new gift the treatment that would have been appropriate for the last one.

Is the story about the foolish bridegroom humorous because we are making fun of a foolish man or because we pity him? Is it perhaps because we see a little of ourselves in him? It is quite likely that the reader's sense of superiority comes into play to some extent. The superiority/degradation theory has been identified by a number of researchers and philosophers as a frequent cause of laughter. Response to moron jokes probably reflects this theory, as does response to stories in which one character appears less bright than others. Even the "dawnzer" scene in Ramona the Pest (12) probably appeals to some children because they can identify with the superior, older members of Ramona's family who laugh at her misunderstanding. The scene in Winnie-the-Pooh (31), where Pooh and Piglet are tracking woozles, is another example of a not-too-bright character depicted humorously. Martha Wolfenstein, a psychoanalyst, calls attention to the fact that children are small and they would very much like to have the size and powers of an adult. (49) Freud, too, pointed out that often, in their play, children will make themselves masters of a situation. When they laugh at a character outwitted or physically overcome by another character, it is possible that children see themselves as the superior character (in a sense, the master of the situation). According to Wolfenstein, information about children's responses also suggests that children who enjoy moron jokes seem to perceive the moron as a man of about 40 or 50 years of age rather than as a child. These are theories which would be interesting to follow up in interviews with children about the characters in books and jokes they

find funny. It would also be interesting to know whether children laugh at story characters because they, themselves, have done similar things and are happy to find out that others are just as foolish.

Inversion is another technique used to create character humor. Bergson describes it as the situation where a character lays a trap and is caught in it. (4) Inversion appears in folk tales such as "Hansel and Gretel" and "The Three Pigs." A contemporary book, Rosie's Walk, (20) brings gleeful response from children as the fox meets with misfortune each time he tries to catch Rosie. Young children find it very funny when the fox makes a hasty exit, chased by a large swarm of bees. Recent studies, discussed later in this paper, suggest that laughter at a character's misfortunes may be associated with stages of moral development which change somewhat with maturity. It certainly is possible that some laughter comes because children fear their own enemies and would like to see them dispatched with as easily.

The incongruity and surprise theories have been of interest to many students of humor. In 1932, Justin used humorous situations and pictures to investigate surprise, superiority, incongruity, the social smile, and relief from strain as factors which produce laughter in children ages three, four, five, and six. (23) The most effective stimulus for the entire group was the social smile given by the tester. Surprise was second and incongruity third. When the results were examined according to the ages of the children, it was found that surprise began to emerge as a stimulus at age four and incongruity showed up at age five. Brighter children responded more strongly to incongruity than less bright children, a finding which seems to support the notion that incongruity appeals to intellectually more mature youngsters. In terms

of these findings, it is interesting to think of books that have surprising situations and are enjoyed by young children. Some that are favorites are John Goodall's Paddy Pork's Holiday (16) and Naughty Nancy (15). The appeal may be enhanced by the half-page format which allows the child to discover a surprising turn of events not evident in the preceding full-page picture.

Many of the stories by Dr. Seuss contain incongruity as a humor stimulus and are funny to five-and six-year-olds. Incongruity, or contrast between the expected and the actual, also appears in many books that older children find humorous. Owls in the Family (34) by the Canadian author, Farley Mowat, contains a number of episodes which appeal because they are incongruous. In one scene, the owls are learning to fly. In the process, they show some reactions which are totally out of keeping with what is normally expected of owls and, because of the incongruity, the episode is very funny. The same is true in a later scene where one owl is shown nipping at the postman's heels as though he were a dog instead of an owl.

The broad categories of humor which account for much that is funny in literature are character humor, play on words, elements of surprise, and the ridiculous, often slapstick, situation. An additional category which might be added is humor based on the impossible, the situation in which fantasy intrudes upon a realistic setting to create laughter. Pippi Longstocking (27) includes a number of episodes which follow that pattern.

In recent years, some psychologists have begun to look at humor from a Piagetian standpoint. Paul McGhee has been responsible for a good deal of the research dealing with children's responses to humor.

His work based on Piagetian theory includes studies of the relationship of humor response to Piaget's fantasy-assimilation mechanism. (14) According to McGhee's interpretation of the theory, children react to surprising events (events which run counter to their expectations based on previous knowledge or experience) in this way. Ordinarily, when faced with a surprising situation, the child will modify ideas so that the new situation is assimilated; however, when the stimulus is given in a fantasy form (a cartoon or picture, for example) the child does not try to accomodate it but, rather, accepts it as an imaginary event and enjoys it. McGhee has found that before a young child will channel fantasy assimilation into a humor response, the child must be aware of the "rules" that would be violated if the situation were assimilated and be confident that it would not actually occur as it is shown. In other words, the child must be sure that it is unreal. McGhee has found that young children are able to assimilate a physical discrepancy. An example of that might be the laughter at Frog Goes to Dinner (30) when children spy a frog peeking out from all kinds of strange places in the restaurant such as a lady's salad, a waiter's pocket, and a champagne glass. By comparison, older children are able to assimilate discrepancies which are implied as well as those which are physically demonstrated.

Psychologists are looking at comprehension as another explanation for differences in humor response. Results of several studies of response to cartoons suggest that the more the cartoon challenges a child's understanding, the funnier it seems to the child. (50). At the point where a child has to work hardest to understand, the humor response is greatest.

Maturity as a factor in humor response has led to the study of moral development as a possible influence on appreciation of humor. The research has its basis in Piaget's theory that less mature children, who are strongly influenced by others, judge rightness and wrongness of an act according to its consequences. He calls those children heteronomous. By contrast, more mature individuals (autonomous children) perceive the person's intent to be more important than the outcome of the act. To study this phenomenon in relation to humor, McGhee used funny anecdotes, some where damage as a result of an act was intentional, others where it was accidental. (29) His subjects included children in grades two, four, and eight and college freshmen. The autonomous (and generally older) children enjoyed stories with highly damaging outcomes only when the damage was unintentional. Two-thirds of the children actually commented that it was funny "because he didn't do it on purpose" or "didn't mean it." Generally, the autonomous children found accidentally damaging situations funnier than intended ones. McGhee concluded that naughtiness, or unacceptability, added to funniness for morally less mature children but detracted from humor appreciation in morally more mature children and adults.

Reaction to different types of incongruity has been studied by psychologists attempting to find maturational differences in response. Schultz and Horibe looked at the way children reacted to two kinds of incongruity which they described as pure and resolvable incongruity. (42) They asked children to respond to cartoons with various kinds of incongruity. An example from their study was the use of lexical incongruity in this joke: "Order! Order in the court!" / "Ham and cheese on rye, please, your Honor." Here, the word "order" gives the resolvable incongruity.

If "silence" had been used, instead, the factor of resolvability would have been removed. Amelia Bedelia by Peggy Parish (38) immediately comes to mind as a book which relies on resolvable incongruity to inspire laughter.

It is not difficult to see that writers and storytellers have at their disposal many literary devices for developing humor. Humor in some stories is based almost entirely on one form of humor. More frequently, however, humor derives from a combination of devices that generate laughter.

Humor in Folk Literature

Perhaps the easiest way to trace the tragi-comic development in children's literature is to go back to the oral tradition which provided early literary experiences for adults as well as for children. Tales of trickery in which a stupid, greedy, or otherwise unpleasant character is fooled are found in folk literature from many countries. "Nail Soup" (Swedish) and "Stone Soup" (French) are examples of this kind of character humor as is "The Boiled Ax," a Russian Tale. In each case, clever soldiers manage to extract a meal from contributions of miserly, but slow-witted, peasants. In the Norse tale, "Gudbrand on the Hillside," the humor comes from the stupidity of a character. Gudbrand's failings are handled with sympathy, however, and he actually emerges a hero in his wife's eyes. That combination of almost slapstick comedy plus a sudden and unexpected turn of events produces a very humorous tale, indeed. "Tom Tit Tot," the English variant of "Rumplestiltskin," plays on the humor produced by a lucky but stupid bride who, by sheer good fortune, is able to elude a wily little creature who nearly has her in his clutches. Tricksters are responsible for some of the humor in

Russian tales such as "The Fox and the Hare." In many African tales, humor evolves from tricks. That is true of Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears (1) and some of the Anansi tales, as well. The wry humor in those tales adds a dimension not found in all porquoi stories.

Surprise, stemming from an unexpected turn in the story, often triggers laughter as it does in the Indian tale, "The Brahman, the Jackal and the Tiger." In that story, the humor is based on several devices, among them the situation in which a proud and cruel animal gets the bad treatment he had intended for someone else. The same reversal of fortune is found in the German tale, "The Four Musicians of Bremen," and its American variant, "Jack and the Robbers." In both stories, the most humorous scenes are developed so as to depict complete chaos verging on a slapstick situation. A very funny German tale, "Gone is Gone," portrays the totally ridiculous situation that occurs when a husband takes on his wife's responsibilities for a day, thinking that her job is easier than his. Here, too, the humor derives from laughter at a foolish character as well as from the chaos which results from the change in roles.

Humor in Contemporary Children's Literature

A look at humor in children's books published in a variety of countries makes it clear that there are many similarities across cultures. Character humor, for example, appears in various forms around the world. A character may be shown as accident-prone. That is true of Homer Price (28) and of Toad in Wind in the Willows. (17) The character may be often misunderstood, as Pinocchio was, (13) or consistently unlucky, as Ramona the Pest (12) or Fflewddur Fflam in Lloyd Alexander's The Book of Three (2) and other books in the Prydain series.

Often a humorous character is a proud and unpleasant person or creature who is eventually overcome by his or her victims. Herr Grundeis Muller Kiesaling, in Emil and the Detectives, (24) is a thief who gets his comeuppance at the hands of a group of boys. In Katze und Maus, (8) Wilhelm Busch manages, through pictures, to create an hilarious incident. The cat, chasing a mouse, gets her head caught in an old boot while the mouse escapes through a hole in the toe. The master and mistress pull so hard to extricate the cat that both fall over backwards as soon as she is released. The brazen cat is banished from the house and the picture story ends with the victorious mouse in a place of honor atop the boot with a circle of admiring mice chanting a song of joy. In Der Bär auf dem Försterball, (19) the bear does a fine job of making the drunken foresters appear very foolish. The bear in Natalie Carlson's Alphonse, That Bearded One (9) is the center of many humorous incidents because a settler of New France has recruited the bear to take his place in the army. In these stories and in others like them, children often enjoy the discomfiture of the characters. They also eympathize with some of them and are interested to see how the characters handle awkward situations.

Laughter from surprise at the unexpected or impossible happening is frequently produced by incongruity between reality and fantasy. Pippi Longstocking (27) is replete with such incongruity. Although some of the humor in Pippi Longstocking stems from laughter at a character, many of the funny episodes emerge because of incongruous happenings. An example is the ridiculous situation that develops when Pippi cleans her floor by tying brushes onto her feet and skating along. In Father Christmas, (7) there is incongruity in the spectacle of Santa muttering to himself as

he dresses on Christmas Day, hitches up his reindeer, delivers the presents, and then goes home to have a mug of ale while his cat sits contentedly by. Frog Goes to Dinner (30) amuses children because of the incongruity between a frog's typical surroundings and the fashionable restaurant in which he has a short stay. Leaping from his owner's pocket, the frog proceeds to chance a very elegant restaurant into a scene of chaos.

The ridiculous situation, which is usually based on incongruity of some sort, frequently emerges as slapstick. The scene in which Wol learns to fly, in Owls in the Family, (34) has a slapstick quality about it. So does the scene in The Finn Family Moomintroll (21) in which the horrible ant-lion is turned into a very small hedgehog when Moomintroll and his friends capture it and place it under the hobgoblin's hat. Paddington at the dentist shows slapstick at its finest as Paddington's very sharp bear teeth and his failure to understand the dentist's intentions lead to some very funny situations. This, too, is an excellent example of a threatening situation which children may learn to view with some degree of humor through experience with humor in literature.

Play on words has long been a favorite means of injecting humor. The contemporary Russian story, "How Dunno Became a Poet," in The Adventures of Dunno and His Friends, (37) shows how silly a poem can be when the poet works so hard for rhyme that meaning is lost. The Great Balloon Race (47) is made more humorous by the use of clever and amusing names: Aristotle Pilaster, Baron Von Blimp, Plato (a dog), and a balloon named Soaring Sylvia. Franklin Stein (40) is a catchy title and so is The King Who Rained. (18) In both cases, the authors rely on children's

ability to derive humor from play on words. The goose in Charlotte's Web (48) who repeats many words is also funny because of the sounds produced. The "tracking scene" from Winnie-the-Pooh (31) certainly includes humor from play on words as well as laughter at a foolish character. Because it is specific to a language, humor formed by play on words may be difficult to translate, yet it is obviously a cross-cultural form of humor.

The reader familiar with children's books, regardless of the language or country of origin, will think of many other titles which might have been included in the previous discussion of universal qualities of humor found in contemporary literature. Indeed, two people from the same language background might not agree as to the best examples of any given type, so intensely personal is the response to humor. It is also difficult to generalize about aspects of humor that appear to dominate books from a particular country. Nevertheless, Dr. Lucia Binder, in an interesting Bookbird article, identifies several patterns in cultural humor. (5) She notes, for example, that bragging and exaggeration are characteristic of American tall tales. Binder suggests that much humorous Italian literature combines whimsical-intellectual humor with comedy of situation and points out that much of the humor is based on self-satire. She characterizes French humor as light, playful, and gaily ironic and humor from Holland, England, and the Eastern countries as broad and comfortable in style. Binder notes, too, that humor closely tied to language, as is the case with much Italian humor, presents considerable difficulty to the translator. One might add that humor tied to language may also be the most difficult for readers to appreciate in translation.

Children's Responses to Humor in Literature

Examination of humor found in books is but one step toward looking at the most important question: How do children respond to humor in literature? Most of the research reported by psychologists has been based on responses to cartoons and jokes and has not really dealt with literary response. However, some studies of response to humor have been reported and they are discussed here. In 1955, Elliot Landau studied responses of New York City sixth graders by asking them to listen to story excerpts and rate the exceprts. The students were also asked to tell what was funny about each story. Results indicated that the favorite types of humor in books were incongruous happenings and impossible and unusual things. (26)

A small study done in 1962 looked at the relationship of measured intelligence to the humor choices of United States fifth graders. (33) Results were based on reactions to books the children read and responded to. A summary of results indicated that low intelligence children chose character humor as the funniest. They especially favored humor derived from funny looking characters or characters made fun of because they were stupid. The high intelligence boys, when they enjoyed character humor, most often chose humor in which a foolish or conceited character was ridiculed. That set of findings seems interesting in view of McGhee's studies of moral development and response to humor. The lower intelligence fifth graders in this study were operating much like McGhee's heteronomous children and the high intelligence boys responded like his older, autonomous subjects.

A larger study of response to humor in literature was reported in 1966. (32) The 635 fifth graders were asked to read and respond to

selections which had been chosen because they included humor based on word play, amusing characters, surprise, the impossible, and the ridiculous situation, associated mainly with incongruity. Books in the study had settings in Sweden, rural and urban United States, and Canada. Results showed no clear pattern of responses for the group. Rather, they differed according to the material read and according to personal preferences of the children. Selections from Henry Huggins (11) and Pippi Longstocking (27) were very well liked. The kinds of humor most often preferred for a given selection were: laughter at a ridiculous situation in the "bus scene" from Henry Huggins (11); laughter at a funny character when Wilbur escapes in Charlotte's Web (48) and when he faints while receiving the prize; laughter at use of words to produce irony in Owls in the Family (34); laughter in Pippi Longstocking (27) at what Pippi says when the policemen try to take her off to school and laughter triggered by surprise when she overcomes the burglars; and laughter at Harry Cat's use of words when he tries to talk Tucker Mouse out of his money in The Cricket in Times Square.(43) The fact that a relatively small percentage of children chose the same category of humor for any excerpt indicates the individuality of response to humor. That individuality was evident, too, in Robert Nelson's study of sixth graders' responses to literary humor. (35) He reported very definite individual reactions to the humor in selections he used. However, he did note a difference between inner-city and rural children, with inner-city children tending to favor action humor and rural children word humor.

In an international study of children's reading interests conducted in 1972, Dorothy Kirsch and H. Alan Robinson surveyed the interests of children in Austria, Canada, England, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Panama, Sweden, and the United States. The data were collected

by one-to-one interviews and by collecting children's own drawings of what they liked best to read. (25) The sample included 2,110 children, of which 1,078 were from the United States. Children in the first year of school ranked funny stories eighth out of twenty-one categories and children in the second year ranked them ninth.

A study done with six-to eleven-year-olds in England examined reaction to various kinds of humor stimuli, including slapstick and subtlety. (3) Bateman identified several kinds of circumstances in literature which trigger laughter. One was the funny incident, which included slapstick. She found such humor to have some appeal at any age but less appeal as children reached a more sophisticated idea of what is funny. Generally, incidents with chaotic outcome, such as those in Gene Zion's Harry the Dirty Dog, (51) were favorites of seven-year-olds. Bateman also looked at reactions to ludicrous nonsense, mainly riddles. She found that subtle humor was enjoyed by bright or mature children but was over the heads of many others and cited The Phantom Tollbooth (22) as an example of subtle humor appealing to her subjects.

Poetry response, too, has provided evidence that children continue to prefer humorous content in what they listen to and read. In a study of poetry preferences of middle grade children in the United States, nine of the ten best-liked poems were poems that could be classed as humorous. (46) Certainly the best-liked poem, Ciardi's "Mummy Slept Late and Daddy Fixed Breakfast," (10) is funny to children and is almost pure slapstick. Children's comments about limericks also indicated that they liked them because they were funny. Limericks have a special kind of surprise ending that appeals, and it is often incongruously mild in view of the action that has taken place. Another poem in the list of the top ten favorites was Laura Richards' "Eletelephony," which is

based on humor derived from play on words.

It is interesting to examine the kinds of humor present in children's books from various countries. Even more important to teachers, however, is the knowledge of how children react to humor in books. That question is difficult to study, but teachers can carry out action research in their classrooms to find out what individuals laugh at. Through conferences, discussions, even reading records and diaries children keep, it may be possible for teachers and their students to become more aware of the humor response, to respect it, and to realize that it may be an important outlet for dealing with fears as well as joys. The sense of humor is an important feature of the literary response. When we share children's enjoyment of humor, we can help them begin to recognize and value their own reactions to literature. Concerning literary response, Alan Purves recommends four kinds of understandings we should help students to attain. They are: know how you respond, respect your response, recognize that others' responses may not be like yours, and respect responses of others even though they differ from yours. (39)

It seems that in no other situation are individual responses as likely to differ as in response to humor. Humorous writing affords an excellent source of material to help children become aware of their own responses and to be tolerant of responses that are different. It is interesting to consider whether children from different cultural and language backgrounds enjoy the same kinds of humor in literature. There is a need for more cross-cultural research in this area, research which might be based on excerpts from humorous books which have been translated into a number of languages. Such research might highlight, as well, some of the universal problems and concerns that are shared by children of

many countries, problems which they can accept as less threatening when they appear in humorous literature.

Children deserve to have a variety of humorous books. Humor research is a serious business -- perhaps too serious. But recent children's books in some countries have also tended to be more often serious than genuinely funny. In time, perhaps that trend will change so that the serious study of humor leads to a reality of more funny books for children and a greater appreciation of the complex humor response.

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